

**VISUAL ANALYSIS FOR  
PROPOSED  
DESCANSO CANYON  
WIRELESS ANTENNA FACILITY**

**P 06-098: ENVIRONMENTAL LOG No.: ER 06-\_\_\_\_\_**

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## **Executive Summary**

The following visual impacts are anticipated due to the implementation of the Descanso Wireless Telecommunications Project (Project).

**1. The Visual Character and Quality of the viewshed will not be impacted significantly due to changes proposed by the Project.**

Changes proposed by the project and seen by a significant number of visual receptors that are sensitive to visual changes, will not prominently contrast with the visual setting. The area affected by these changes is of moderate to high visual quality.

**2. The Project would not result in the removal or substantial adverse change to a valued visual resource.**

The Project is surrounded by valued visual resources that will remain unchanged as a result of the construction and operation of this facility.

**3. The project would not substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal point and/or panoramic vista.**

As a stealth design, in conjunction with proposed landscaping, the project will appear largely consistent with the existing landscape and visual character of the surrounding area. The project is also anticipated to provide beneficial impacts by providing screening of two existing water tanks that presently contrast to a moderate degree with the surrounding visual environment.

**4. The project is in compliance with applicable goals, policies and requirements pertaining to visual resources and telecommunications facilities.**

As a stealth design, the project as proposed, will appear largely consistent with the existing landscape and visual character of the surrounding community. The project would not result in significant adverse visual character impacts and would be consistent with County policy related to wireless telecommunications facilities and visual effects.

The telecommunications tower and associated equipment enclosure, as proposed, will not cause a substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic effect to views from the surrounding area

**5. No significant cumulative visual impacts are anticipated when considering the project in conjunction with other cumulatively considerable projects.**

## **1.0 Introduction**

### ***1.1 Purpose of the Visual Resources Report***

This study has been prepared to provide information regarding visual impacts associated with proposed telecommunication equipment (Project) located at 11190 Highway 79, Descanso, California in the County of San Diego's Central Mountain Community Planning Area (see Figure 1, Regional Location Map). This study has been prepared to assess the visual impacts to surrounding residential areas, the Highway 79 road corridor, surrounding recreational areas, and other public areas that will result from the construction of this Project (as revised 7-5-07).

### ***1.2 Key Issues***

- Visibility of the facility and proposed improvements from surrounding sensitive areas and key views
- Degree of visual contrast between the proposed equipment and the surrounding area
- Visibility of the facility from surrounding scenic routes and roadways

### ***1.3 Principal Viewpoints Covered***

A field survey was conducted October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007 to assess the visibility of the Project from the surrounding area. View Points (VPs), consisting of photographs taken from public and private viewpoints (to support the analysis) were selected based on the number and frequency of views, sensitivity of viewers, and the types of project-related features that would be visible. Specifically, locations for Key Views were selected using the following criteria:

- Type of view – public or private
- Breadth of the view (views taking in a number of elements rely less on any one element than those focusing on a specific criterion)
- Depth of the view (increased distance from the observed element makes it appear smaller, less detail is registered, and visibility may be affected by atmospheric conditions such as fog, smog, etc.)
- Duration of view
- Number of viewers exposed to the view (a greater number of viewers makes the view more sensitive)
- Designated scenic viewpoints and scenic highways are considered sensitive viewpoints

#### **VP1-VP3**

Views along Highway 79 contain views characteristic of the Descanso area such as prominent peaks and ridgelines, riparian woodlands, natural

preserves, and broad valley vistas. To a traveler heading south on Highway (79) views are available of the project beginning at approximately VP1, the East Mesa Parking area for the Cuyamaca Rancho State Park (State Park). At this point Hwy 79 rises over a saddle formation of the Cuyamaca Mountains and begins its descent to the south parallel the Descanso Creek corridor. In this segment of Hwy 79, where views toward the project are available, the site is visible at the top of a localized knoll backed by a prominent ridgeline. Overhead utilities are visible as is a graded fire road/multi-purpose trail located within the State Park. Two existing water tanks and associated access road are visible in the background.

As one continues south on Highway 79 the project remains visible over a .3-mile stretch of highway until becoming blocked by dense riparian woodland associated with the Descanso Creek drainages. Here views toward the project are blocked by foreground vegetation. It is at about this point where Oakzanita Ranch, the location of the proposed project, and the western boundary of the state park, are located. In the background, several residences, outbuildings, and campsites of the Oakzanita Springs Campground, are visible. Viewpoint 18 represents a private view taken from a location adjacent Hwy 79 within the Descanso Creek corridor – note the visible riparian woodland.

#### **VP4 - 6**

A traveler heading north on Highway 79 is presented with short duration views of the project that begin approximately at Camino de Tierra (VP4). These views continue along a narrow corridor for approximately .15 miles. Mature trees (VP6) and steep foreground topography (VP5 ) substantially screen the project from view.

#### **VP7 - VP13**

Views of the project are available from trail locations within the State Park as demonstrated in VPs 7 through 13. From these locations, the project site is visible both against a natural background of ridgelines and prominent landforms (VP7) and as a silhouette in front of a background of sky (VP9 and VP13).

#### **VP14 - VP18**

Views of the project are available from privately owned parcels in the project vicinity. Viewpoint 14 is an onsite view looking towards the project. Viewpoint 15 is a view of the project from the Baker Ranch, a 40-acre parcel that adjoins the Project site to the south. Viewpoints 17 through 19 are views toward the project from private parcels located to the east of the Project.

## **2.0 Project Description**

The Project consists of the construction and operation of unmanned, wireless telecommunications facility consisting of co-located Verizon & Sprint/Nextel Wireless equipment. One custom built, T-shaped building (22'-33'-6"), painted an earth tone color to match the natural surroundings, will house the equipment of both carriers. It will contain a tiled, gable roof designed to match the roofline of the on-site residence. Additionally proposed is an 8-foot concrete block enclosure and concrete pad for an emergency generator. Two proposed monopines, each with three, four-panel antenna arrays, are proposed. One will be 35-feet in height, the other 40-feet. Antenna enclosures on both monopines are painted to match the color of the faux pine needles. Six (6) live pine trees, planted from 24" box containers, will surround the proposed equipment. Two air conditioning units are located along the east side of the enclosure and two (2) GPS antennas are mounted to the equipment shelter. Utilities will be undergrounded. Specific details and locations of the equipment are provided as Figure 5, Site Plan and Figure 6, Enlarged Site Plan. Elevations of the proposed equipment area provided as Figures 7 and 8, Project Elevations.

### ***2.1 Land Use Designations and Zoning***

The property is zoned S92 (General Rural Use Regulations) which allows Wireless Telecommunications Facilities under the Tier 4 Classification upon approval of a Major Use Permit pursuant to Section 6985(A) of the Zoning Ordinance. The site is not considered a preferred zone under Section 6986 of the Zoning Ordinance however co-locations in zones other than residential are considered Preferred Locations pursuant to Section 6986 (A) of the Zoning Ordinance. Access to the Project is located on State Highway 79.

### ***2.2 Regulatory Framework***

#### ***2.2.1 Applicable Policies and Planning Documents***

Visual resources are subject to plans, and policies developed to ensure adequate consideration is given to preserving and/or enhancing the visual qualities of an area. The proposed project is subject to the following guidelines and policies.

#### ***2.2.2 County of San Diego***

##### ***A. General Plan - Scenic Highway Element***

The Scenic Highway Element of the San Diego County General Plan (adopted January 1975, amended December 1986) was established to preserve and enhance the County's scenic, historic and recreational resources with a network of scenic highway corridors. The County has designated numerous roadways as scenic routes, based on the following criteria:

- Routes traversing and accessing major recreation or scenic resources
- Routes traversing lands under the jurisdiction of public agencies
- Routes supported by significant local community interest
- Routes offering unique opportunities for the protection and enhancement of scenic recreational and historical resources

A County-designated First Priority Scenic Route (route meeting three or more of the Scenic Highway System Priority List criteria) is located adjacent the project site and consists of SR 79 from Interstate 8 north to the intersection of Sunrise Highway including the portion within the State Park.

### ***B. Central Mountain Community Plan***

The project site is located within the Central Mountain Community Plan (County of San Diego 1979) area. The following Central Mountain Community Plan element goals and policies apply.

#### **1. Community Character**

##### *Goals*

PRESERVE THE SMALL-TOWN, RURAL CHARACTER OF THE COMMUNITIES IN THE SUBREGION AND THE NATURAL AMBIANCE OF MOUNTAINS, HILLS, VALLEYS AND PUBLIC LANDS.

ENCOURAGE THE PROTECTION OF EXISTING VEGETATION, WILDLIFE AND OTHER NATURAL RESOURCES.

#### **2. Land Use**

##### *Goals*

##### *A. GENERAL*

PRESERVE THE INTEGRITY OF THE CLEVELAND NATIONAL FOREST AND THE CUYAMACA RANCHO STATE PARK BY MINIMIZING IMPACTS OF ACTIVITIES ON PRIVATE INHOLDINGS OR ADJACENT PROPERTIES.

##### *Policies and Recommendations*

##### *B. DESCANSO*

1. To minimize visual impacts, water tanks shall be painted or screened. [CP]

#### **3. Private holdings in, or Lands Adjacent to, U.S. Forest Service Lands and State Parks**

##### *Goals*

PRESERVE THE INTEGRITY OF THE CLEVELAND NATIONAL FOREST AND THE CUYAMACA RANCHO STATE PARK AND THEIR USES BY MINIMIZING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS DUE TO ACTIVITIES ON PRIVATE INHOLDINGS OR ADJACENT PROPERTIES.

MINIMIZE IMPACTS ON PRIVATE PROPERTY DUE TO PUBLIC ACTIVITIES ON PUBLIC LANDS.

ESTABLISH OPEN SPACE CORRIDORS TO MAINTAIN BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND TO MAINTAIN VIABLE ACCESS FOR WILDLIFE TO AND FROM WATER, FOOD, AND BREEDING AREAS.

#### *Policies and Recommendations*

##### A. GENERAL

All development on private in holdings or adjacent properties shall aim to minimize impacts on adjacent public lands, especially with regard to visual, biological, noise, and dark sky resources. [CP]

#### **4. Scenic Highways/Routes and Scenic Preservation**

##### *Goals*

1. PROTECT AND ENHANCE SCENIC VIEWS, WILDLIFE HABITATS, NATIVE PLANT MATERIALS, AND HISTORICAL AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES WITHIN SCENIC HIGHWAY CORRIDORS.
2. PROTECT AND ENHANCE AREAS DESIGNATED AS HAVING SCENIC VALUE.

##### *Policies and Recommendations*

1. Amendment to the Scenic Highways Element should be considered to add the roads identified as scenic in this text. [CP]
2. The County should request that the State designate Highway 79 and Interstate 8 as official scenic highways by adopting a resolution of intent as specified by current guidelines for the official designation of scenic highways published by Caltrans. [GEN]
3. All development subject to the scenic regulations per The Zoning Ordinance shall also be subject to the following Policies and Recommendations:

- a. All development shall be required to show on a Site Plan how lot sizes, structures, and open space easements relate to the road identified as scenic and/or to properties from which it is visible. [CP]
- b. Development on significant or prominent peaks and ridgelines, shall be discouraged. [CP]

Factors to be considered when reviewing building sites on peaks and ridgelines shall be:

- (a) How visible the proposed project is from a scenic road or public area (such as a park), and whether the project can be substantially screened from view;
- (b) How close the ridgeline or peak is to public areas, or a scenic road, relative to other peaks or ridgelines;

- (c) How tall the peak or ridgeline is relative to other peaks or ridgelines; and
- (d) The relative uniqueness or significance of the peak or ridgeline on which the development is proposed.
- c. Structures shall be consistent with the natural contours of the land and shall not exceed 15 feet above the peak or ridgeline. [CP]
- e. All rezones of properties located along a scenic highway or road identified as scenic in this text shall include an "S" or a "D" Special Area Designator. [CP]
- f. All utilities shall be undergrounded whenever feasible unless undergrounding would significantly impact environmental resources. [DPW]
- g. Water tanks shall not be obtrusive; they should be painted National Forest colors, and/or landscaped with drought tolerant plants native to the Central Mountain Area. [CP]

## **5. Dark Sky**

### *Goal*

PRESERVE DARK NIGHT SKIES TO MAINTAIN COMMUNITY CHARACTER IN THE CENTRAL MOUNTAIN AREA AND TO INSURE THE CONTINUED ASTRONOMICAL RESEARCH AND EXPLORATION BY THE MOUNT LAGUNA OBSERVATORY AND LOCAL ASTRONOMERS.

### *Policies and Recommendations*

1. Strictly enforce the County's Light Pollution Ordinance. [CP]
2. Lighting shall be strictly limited to what is absolutely necessary for safety. [CP]
3. The use of technology advances (such as motion sensitive night lighting systems) which will reduce present and future light pollution will be encouraged. [CP]
4. The impacts of future development upon the dark sky characteristics of the planning area shall be minimized. [CP]

## **6. Visual Resources**

### *Goal*

PREVENT VISUAL BLIGHT AND DEGRADATION OF THE VISUAL RESOURCES IN THE CENTRAL MOUNTAIN SUBREGION.

### *Policies and Recommendations*

2. Development shall be designed to follow the natural preserve hillsides, ridgetops and horizons. [CP]

### ***C. Resource Protection Ordinance***

The County's Resource Protection Ordinance (RPO) provides special regulations applicable to certain types of discretionary applications, including tentative maps. The ordinance focuses on the preservation and protection of the County's unique topography, natural beauty, diversity, natural resources, and quality of life. It is intended to protect the integrity of sensitive lands including wetlands, wetland buffers, floodplains/floodways, sensitive habitats, cultural resources, and steep slopes, which are components of visual quality and community character.

The RPO defines steep slopes as all lands having a natural gradient of 25 percent or greater and a minimum rise of 50 vertical feet, unless said land has been substantially disturbed by previous legal grading.

### ***D. Dark Skies/Glare***

The County of San Diego Outdoor Lighting Ordinance (Division 9, sections 59.101-59.15 of the San Diego County Zoning Ordinance) seeks to control undesirable light rays emitted into the night sky in order to reduce detrimental effects on astronomical research. Zone A, defined as the area within a 15-mile radius centered on the Palomar Observatory and within a 15-mile radius centered on the Mount Laguna Observatory has specific light emission restrictions. The unincorporated portions of San Diego County not within Zone A fall within Zone B, and are subject to lesser restrictions. The project site is located less than 15 miles from Mts. Palomar and Laguna, and is therefore within the Outdoor Lighting Ordinance Zone A.

### ***E. Section 6980-Zoning Ordinance: Wireless Telecommunications Facilities***

The following design regulations are relevant to the project.

B. All camouflaged facilities shall be designed to visually and operationally blend into the surrounding area in a manner consistent with community character and existing development. The facility shall also be appropriate for the specific site, i.e., it should not "stand out" from its surrounding environment, such as a faux tree standing alone in a field or standing at a greater height (five feet or more) than other trees on the site.

C. In cases where the facility site is visible from "Official", "First", "Second" or "Third" Priority Scenic Highways, as identified in the General Plan, the facility shall be designed and located in such a manner as to avoid adverse visual impacts. Such locations shall use design methods such as, but not limited to, type of facility, camouflaging, screening and landscaping. No monopoles, lattice towers or guyed towers are permitted.

D. In cases where the facility site is visible from "Official," "First," "Second," or "Third" Priority Scenic Highways, as identified in the General Plan, the

facility shall be designed and located in such a manner as to avoid adverse visual impacts. Such locations shall use design methods such as, but not limited to, type of facility, camouflaging, screening and landscaping.

F. All facilities shall be designed to minimize the visual impact to the greatest extent feasible by means of placement, screening, landscaping with native species, whenever feasible, and camouflage, and to be compatible with existing .... and other site characteristics.

K. All high visibility facilities shall be sited in such a manner as to cause the least detriment to the viewshed of adjoining properties.

O. In cases where the facility site is visible from a County park or is proposed to be located in a County Park, the facility shall be designed and located in such a manner as to avoid adverse visual impacts. Such locations shall use design methods such as, but not limited to, type of facility, camouflaging, screening and landscaping. No monopoles, lattice towers or guyed towers are permitted.

P. The use of chain link fences for security of equipment is permitted if the fence is fully screened by landscaping. No razor wire or barbed wire is permitted. Slats do not satisfy the requirement for screening.

Q. Site lighting shall be kept to a minimum in every instance, shall be shielded to direct the light downward, shall be controlled by a manual switch or timed switch of no greater than one hour's duration and shall not be used except when nighttime maintenance is necessary.

R. No facility sited on a ridgeline or hilltop shall be approved unless the facility blends with the surrounding existing and man-made environment to the maximum extent possible and a finding is made that no other location is feasible.

### **3.0 Visual Environment of the Project**

#### ***3.1 Project Setting***

The Project is located on the Oakzanita Ranch, a 39.99-acre rural parcel used primarily as a horse training/boarding facility. Development is concentrated on the lower portions of eastern third (approximate) of the property where there exists a primary residence, a barn, several small utility sheds and horse corrals. There are also two walking and training racks for horses, a small orchard, and small grape vineyard. Steep slopes and natural vegetation dominate the central and western portions of the site, which consists of a localized knoll and saddle ridge of the Cuyamaca Mountain. The topography is part of the Descanso Creek watershed. Two water tanks and associated graded access road are located in the south-central portion of the property. The topography of the site is varied and ranges from a low of approximately 3,860 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) to a high of 4,122 feet

AMSL, where the water tanks are located. Several graded horse trails traverse the site and connect with multi-purpose trails located within the Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, which abuts the property to the north and west. Dense riparian woodland and other plantings are concentrated along the lower eastern portions of the property – those areas adjoining Highway 79. Where open space prevails it consists primarily of northern mixed chaparral.

### ***3.2 Project Viewshed***

A “viewshed” is an analytical tool used to aid in the identification of views that could be affected by a potential project. The viewshed is defined as the surrounding geographic area from which the project is likely to be seen, based on topography and land use patterns. The viewshed boundary for the proposed project was determined through the analysis of aerial photographs and topographic maps, and was field verified by project analysts. Variations between potential visibility to the site and actual possible views are discussed in the text below. The viewshed boundary represents the geographic limits for this visual assessment.

The Generalized Viewshed exhibit, provided as Figure 2, illustrates the limits of the generalized project viewshed. The viewshed, as delineated on this exhibit, is confined generally to the areas located within the north/south oriented ridgelines that parallel Highway 79 and the Descanso Creek corridor. This includes large portions of Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, Cleveland National Forest, and neighboring rural parcels to the south of the site. Figures 9 through 12 contain photographs depicting the Project viewshed.

### ***3.3 Visual Character Units***

Visual Character Units characterize areas of the site that have similar visual properties. They serve to define the baseline visual environment to enable comparisons to the construction and post construction conditions. This assists in determining whether a project will result in physical changes that are incompatible with visual character or that will degrade the visual quality within the viewshed. Visual Character Units are also evaluated with regard to their ability to absorb change. One Visual Character Unit is relevant to this project and described below:

#### ***Water Tower Knoll – Saddle Ridge***

Viewpoint 9, Figure 17, depicts the Water Tower Knoll – Saddle Ridge Visual Character Unit which consists of a localized knoll and saddle ridge of the Cuyamaca Mountain Range. This area has a rural, open space character, and contains two existing water towers and graded access road that contrast moderately with the otherwise intact natural open space patterns. These open space patterns consist primarily of northern mixed chaparral and rock

outcrops. Tall, visually prominent ridgelines, peaks, and broad patterns of natural open space surround the area.

Visible scarring associated with the graded access road and interruption of the the upper portion of the knoll by the contrasting pattern attributes of the water tanks reduce the areas vividness, intactness, and unity. As a result, **this area is considered to be of moderate visual quality. This area is also considered to be moderately sensitive to change.** This is due to the areas lack of intactness and prominence of surrounding open space and landforms.

## **4.0 Existing Visual Resources and Viewer Response**

### ***4.1 Existing Visual Resources***

Visual effects – adverse or beneficial –likely to be associated with a project are based on changes to the existing visual environment. Our visual understanding is based on the visual character of objects and the relationships between them. The assessment of visual character is descriptive and distinguishes at least two levels of attributes: pattern elements and pattern character. Visual pattern elements are primary visual attributes of objects and include form, line color, and texture. The form of an object is its visual mass, bulk, or shape. An object's edges or parts define line. The color of an object is both its value and hue. Texture is apparent surface coarseness.

Our awareness of these pattern elements varies with distance. From afar, only the largest objects are viewed as individual forms and we may see a city hillside as a textured surface. Distance also attenuates the intensity of colors.

Visual character refers to the visual relationships between these pattern elements and is an important secondary visual attribute of an object or an entire landscape. Differences in visual character are often attributable to visual contrast and generally traced to four aspects of pattern character: dominance, scale, diversity, and continuity. For example, there is a great difference between the visual character of a two-lane country road and an eight-lane freeway, although both may exhibit similar line, color, and texture.

Specific components in a landscape may be visually dominant because of position, extent, or contrast of basic pattern elements. Scale is the apparent size relationship between a landscape component and its surroundings; an object can be made to look smaller or larger in scale by manipulating its visual pattern elements. Visual diversity is a function of the number, variety, and intermixing of visual pattern elements. Continuity is the uninterrupted flow of pattern elements in a landscape and the maintenance of visual relationships between immediately connected or related landscape components.

We assess both the project and the project setting according to these attributes; if their visual character is similar, the visual compatibility of the project will be high. If the visual character of the project contrasts strongly with the visual character of its setting, its visual compatibility will generally be low.

Aesthetics is not only concerned with the character of the visual experience, but also with its excellence. Where it exists, this excellence has both viewer and visual resource dimensions. The enjoyment or interpretation of experience can have many preferential and subjective components, yet there is clear public agreement that the visual resources of certain landscapes have high visual quality and that plans for projects in these areas should therefore be subject to careful examination.

On the level of visual information or visual character, such landscapes may have little in common. For example, high visual quality exists in urban landscapes such as the San Francisco skyline as well as in natural landscapes such as the Mojave Desert. Because of the differences that exist in the character of these visual environments, a project in an area with high visual quality does not always have an adverse effect on that visual quality.

To evaluate visual quality we use the following criteria: vividness, intactness, and unity of the existing visual setting. All three must be high to indicate high quality. Vividness is the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in striking and distinctive visual patterns. Intactness is the visual integrity of the natural and man-built landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements. Unity is the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole.

In summary, the visual compatibility between a proposed project and the existing visual environment is determined by comparing their visual character and by generalizing the principle that high contrast is likely to affect high visual quality.

A project's consistency with relevant adopted County policies relating to visual resources is also evaluated.

## ***4.2 Viewer Response***

Viewer response is composed of two elements; viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure. These elements combine to form a method of predicting how the viewers might react to visual changes brought about by a project.

### ***4.2.1 Viewer Sensitivity***

Visual sensitivity is based on an area's ability to absorb changes in character and quality. Areas with a high sensitivity to change are those that are visually prominent, distinctive, contain a dominant visual character

element, and have high visual quality. These are areas that would contrast to a great degree with a proposed improvement.

An area with moderate sensitivity to change would contain a several visual character elements that vary in form, line, color, and texture, and that is of moderate visual quality.

An area with low sensitivity to change are those that have many visual character elements that vary in form, line, color and texture, and is of low visual quality.

The area surrounding the proposed project is moderately to highly sensitive to change given its proximity to the Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, Cleveland National Forest, and proximity to manmade elements.

#### ***4.2.2 Viewer Groups***

Viewer groups include the following:

1. Motorist and cyclists traveling along Hwy 79
2. Surrounding Residents
2. Recreational users such as equestrian and pedestrian trail users

#### ***4.2.3 Viewer Exposure***

The number of viewers and the duration of views are important to analyzing impacts.

The majority of viewers are those travelling along Highway 79. These views are of short duration due to foreground view blocking topography and vegetation and structures. To a motorist traveling south on Highway 79 views of the project would be available over a .3 mile stretch of highway, approximately 24 seconds at 45 miles per hour (mph). To a motorist traveling north on Highway 79 views of the project would be available over a .15 mile stretch of highway, approximately 12 seconds at 45 mph.

For recreational users, views are potentially longer in duration but affect a smaller number of users. Hikers, bikers, equestrian users, and those camped at the Thousand Trails Oakzanita Springs Campground have views towards the project.

Residents, the smallest number of viewers, have the longest duration views toward the project.

#### ***4.2.4 Viewer Awareness***

A viewer's response is affected by the degree to which they are receptive to the visual details, character, and quality of the surrounding landscape. A viewer's ability to perceive the landscape is affected by their activity. Viewer awareness is anticipated as follows:

To motorists and passengers traveling along Hwy 79, at speed, the perception of the visual environment tends to be forward, and narrow in scope. The recognition of details is low. The breath of view is further narrowed due to a curvilinear road condition and edge condition of mature vegetation, landforms, and view blocking structures.

Recreational users such as hikers have a wider scope of view and are exposed to broad vistas containing dominant ridgelines, peaks, and valleys. This exposure has the effect of limiting the perception of details associated with the Project since they are seen within the context of a far greater visual landscape.

Residents have views toward the Project that encompass foreground man-made elements, natural backgrounds, and the existing water towers. It is anticipated that viewer awareness is diminished as these views are seen on a regular basis.

## **5.0 Visual Impact Assessment**

The following discussion addresses changes to the existing visual character resulting from implementation of the project. Visual effects were determined via analysis of the viewshed from public roadways, private residences, and consistency with adopted County policies relating to visual resources and telecommunications facilities.

### ***5.1 Guidelines for Determining Significance***

#### ***Thresholds of Significance***

A project will generally be considered to have a significant effect if it proposes any of the following, absent specific evidence to the contrary.<sup>1</sup>

1. The project would introduce features that would detract from or contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality of localized area by conflicting with important visual elements or the quality of the area (such as theme, style, setbacks, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, architecture, building materials, etc.) or by being inconsistent with applicable design guidelines.
2. The project would result in the removal or substantial adverse change of one or more features that contribute to the valued visual character or image of the neighborhood, community, or localized area, including but not limited to landmarks (designated), historic resources, trees, and rock outcroppings.
3. The project would substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from a public road, a trail within

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<sup>1</sup> Per County of San Diego Guidelines for Determining Significance

an adopted County or State trail system, a scenic vista or highway, or a recreational area.

4. The project would not comply with applicable goals, policies or requirements of an applicable County Community Plan, Subregional Plan, Historic Resources Inventory, or Design Review Guidelines.

These thresholds address State CEQA Guidelines and County of San Diego Guidelines for Determining Significance. The approach for evaluating visual resources is based on common industry practices for evaluating visual resources both objectively (visual character) and subjectively (visual quality) and accomplished by comparing the visual environment resulting from project construction and operation with the existing visual environment.

## **5.2 Key Views**

Key Views are representative views in which the project could be viewed as a prominent feature based on the following: the type of view; public or private (public being considered more sensitive); breadth of view (views taking in a number of elements rely more on the project as a whole than those focusing on a specific feature); view distance; view duration; the number of viewers exposed (greater the number, the more sensitive the view); and whether the project adversely impacts scenic vistas and/or designated scenic highways. The Key Views that follow are the result of this analysis and are depicted on Figure 4, *Local Vicinity Map*, and used in the analysis that follows.

## **5.3 Analysis of Project Effects and Determination of Significance**

The following discussion addresses changes to the existing visual character resulting from implementation of the Project in accordance with significance thresholds 1, and 2, listed above. Visual effects were determined via analysis of viewshed from public roadways, private residences, public facilities, and grading and landform alteration based on significance thresholds listed above. This study also evaluates consistency with the applicable sections of the Central Mountain Plan, the County General Plan, the County Zoning Ordinance, and the Dark Sky Ordinance, pursuant to significance thresholds 3, and 4, listed above.

**1. The project would introduce features that would detract from or contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality or localized area by conflicting with important visual elements or the quality of the area (such as theme, style, setbacks, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, architecture, building materials, etc.) or by being inconsistent with applicable design guidelines**

### **State Route 79**

State Route 79 (SR 79), a First Priority Scenic Route, borders the Project site along its eastern edge. SR 79 is a First Priority Scenic Route from Interstate 8

north to the Sunrise Highway. The visual character of land adjacent SR 79, in the vicinity of the Project, is defined by elements characteristic of the Descanso area such vast natural open space preserves containing mixed chaparral, oak woodlands. Rock outcroppings, prominent ridgelines, peaks, knolls, and rural residences with equestrian-themed fencing. Overhead utilities follow portions of the Highway and two existing water tanks are visible on top of the knoll upon which the project is proposed.

The project is visible from the Hwy 79 corridor however, as a stealth design, the Project, consisting of live pine trees surrounding an equipment enclosure designed to look like a residential outbuilding, will be consistent with other natural and man-made elements in view. The live pines will provide visual context and screening for the monopine and will serve to screen the lower portions of equipment from view. The monopine and live pines will reduce the contrasting form, line, and color of the existing water tanks from areas within the Hwy 79 corridor. From the southern portion of the SR 79 corridor the monopine and live vegetation will provide visual screening for the existing water tanks and reduce their contrast with the surrounding visual environment. From areas directly east and northeast of the Project, proposed equipment will help reduce the contrast between the pattern elements associated with the existing tanks and knoll by introducing natural appearing interruptions to the landform upon which the water tanks are located. From areas northeast of the project, along the northern portions of the Hwy 79 corridor, the project will be viewed against a backdrop of sky. The equipment from these areas (VP1-VP3) is visible as foreground view-blocking plantings. To the majority of viewers the Project will appear similar in form, line, color, and texture to the planted live pines that surround it. The pine trees and monopines will appear as natural extensions of the greater landscape that contains mixed conifers such as Jeffrey and Ponderosa Pines. This will serve to soften the contrast between the profile of the landform and existing water tanks by introducing natural appearing breaks in the silhouette of the knoll (see Simulation 1, Figure 23 and Simulation 3, Figure 25).

While the upper portions of the monopine will be visible, the contrast of the facility with the existing visual environment will be minimized to the greatest extent possible through site planning, architectural details, coloration, and landscape. As a result, a slight change in visual character is anticipated but will not result in significant visual impacts to viewers traveling along this corridor.

#### **Area Residences and Private Recreational Views**

Several homes are located within the Project's southeastern viewshed. These residences are located at a lower elevation than the project, primarily within areas of riparian woodland that parallel Descanso Creek. This vegetation screens the project from view from many of these residential areas. Where

views are available however they will be long term and stationary. Viewpoints 14 and 15, Figure 20 provide an on-site view looking towards the project from the east and a view from the Baker Ranch property located to the south. Viewpoint 17, Figure 21, depicts a view from the Thousand Trails Oakzanita Campground, a private membership recreational vehicle (RV) campground. Viewpoint 18, Figure 22, depicts a private view from a residence located southeast of the site. As the Viewpoints demonstrate, foreground natural and man-made improvements provide context for the Project elements. As an unmanned, stealth facility, the Project is designed to visually and operationally blend into the surroundings. The equipment enclosure and proposed landscaping will appear as a residential outbuilding surrounded by trees and the project will, as a result, not “stand out” from its visual environment. The landscaping will provide visual screening and context for the monopine.

The monopine and live vegetation will also screen portions of the existing water tanks, a beneficial effect. From the surrounding residences and Oakszanita campground the water tanks are seen contrasting with the natural pattern elements in view. This breaks the continuity of the natural vegetative patterns and landform. The project landscaping and monopines will provide screening of the tanks and subsequently reduce their contrast in the visual environment.

Project implementation is not anticipated to introduce features that would detract from or contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality of localized area by conflicting with important visual elements or quality of the area.

### **Public Recreational Facilities**

Views of the project are available from areas along trails within the Cuyamaca Rancho State Park and Cleveland National Forest that lies to the north, west and east of the Project. Oakszanita Peak (5,854' AMSL), the East Mesa Fire Road, South Boundary Fire Road, and Upper and Lower Descanso Creek Trails are located north and east of the Project. The Blue Ribbon Trail is located west of the site. Viewpoint 7, Figure 16, depicts a view midway up Oakszanita Peak and Viewpoints 8, 9 and 10, Figures 16 & 17, contain views from the East Mesa Fire Road and East Side Trail. Views of the Project from these locations are distant and encompass a wide range of scenery such as vast areas of open space, dominant ridgelines, and peaks. From these locations, the project is anticipated to appear as a natural extension of the surrounding landscape. Many of the views toward the project are backed by patterns of natural vegetation, rock groupings, and dominant landforms. This visual diversity reduces viewer sensitivity towards the Project. The monopine, live vegetation, and equipment enclosure will relate to forms, colors, and textures in the existing visual setting and enable the Project to minimize its contrast to the greatest extent possible with the surrounding

landscape. Viewpoints 11 and 12, Figure 18 depict views of the Project site from the South Boundary Fire Trail located north of the site. Some of these trail locations are in close proximity to the Project (see Viewpoints 11, 12, and 13, Figures 18 & 19). From areas along these trails the water tanks are prominently featured in the landscape. This is due to the contrasting form, line, color, and texture of the tanks with the surrounding vegetative patterns and natural landform. Implementation of the Project will introduce vertical elements that are similar in appearance to the surrounding landscape. The equipment enclosure, where visible behind landscape screening, will relate in color and form to man-made and natural elements in view. The monopines and live vegetation will provide a backdrop for the water tanks and effectively reduce their pattern contrast with the visual setting – a beneficial effect.

As a result, Project implementation is not anticipated to introduce features that would detract from or contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality of localized area by conflicting with important visual elements or quality of the area.

**2. The project would result in the removal or substantial adverse change of one or more features that contribute to the valued visual character or image of the neighborhood, community, or localized area, including but not limited to landmarks (designated), historic resources, trees, and rock outcroppings.**

The property contains steep slopes and undisturbed native vegetation considered sensitive under RPO. The project is not anticipated to disturb these areas and proposes development on a localized knoll that is not visually prominent.

**3. The project would substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from a public road, a trail within an adopted County or State trail system, a scenic vista or highway, or a recreational area.**

As mentioned above, portions of the project site are visible from Hwy 79, a County designated First Priority Scenic Highway and State “Eligible” Scenic Highway. The site is also visible from trails within State Park lands. Highway 79 allows for a variety of visual experiences for drivers approaching and traveling through the valley within which the project is located.

Expansive views are available along portions of Hwy 79 to the north of the site and from segments of trails and viewpoints within designated recreational areas. These views include both man-made and natural elements including the two existing water tanks located near the site. The proposed Project would not be large-scale and the project landscaping and stealth design of the equipment will serve to soften the equipment enclosure as well as the existing water tanks. Additionally, the surrounding viewshed elements such as steep natural slopes and ridgelines that surround the project site would not be altered, remaining as dominant background elements. The

vegetation and stealth design, including the earth tone coloration of the equipment enclosure, will enable the project to relate to pattern elements in view. As a result, the change is anticipated to be less than significant to existing views from the Hwy 79 corridor and the recreational areas that surround the project.

**4. The project would not comply with applicable goals, policies or requirements of an applicable County Community Plan, Subregional Plan, Historic Resources Inventory, or Design Review Guidelines.**

**a. State of California**

As discussed previously, Hwy 79 is an Eligible Scenic Highway. Potential impacts to the Highway from project implementation are addressed above.

**b. County of San Diego General Plan – Scenic Highway Element.**

As discussed previously, Hwy 79 is an Eligible Scenic Highway. Potential impacts to the Highway from project implementation are addressed above.

**c. Central Mountain Community Plan**

The Central Mountain Community Plan outlines goals and policies that seek to preserve the current community character. Goals and policies applicable to the Project's visual character are cited in Subsection 2.2 of this report.

These require the Project to address the following elements: Community Character, Land Use, Dark Sky, Visual Resources, and Scenic Highways.

Compliance with the applicable elements of the Community Plan are addressed in the discussion above.

**d. Resource Protection Ordinance**

Compliance with the applicable elements of the RPO are addressed in the discussion above.

**e. Dark Skies/Glare**

The project would conform to the San Diego Light Pollution Code and would be in conformance with Light Pollution Code Zone A requirements.

**f. Section 6980-Zoning Ordinance: Wireless Telecommunications Facilities**

The project would conform to this section of the Zoning Ordinance. As a camouflaged facility, it is designed to visually and operationally blend into its surroundings in a manner consistent with community character and existing development.

The facility has been designed and located to avoid adverse visual impacts from Hwy 79, a designated First Priority Scenic Highway.

The facility has also been designed to minimize the visual impacts to the greatest extent feasible by means of placement, screening, landscaping with native species, and camouflaged.

The facility has been sited to cause the least detriment to the viewshed of adjoining properties.

The facility has been designed and located to avoid adverse visual impacts to nearby parks.

Site lighting is kept to a minimum and shall only be used when nighttime maintenance is necessary.

While the facility is sited on a hilltop it has been designed to blend with the surrounding existing and man-made environment and will provide beneficial effects by screening existing, visually prominent water tanks nearby.

### ***5.6 Cumulative Impacts***

Cumulative impacts to visual resources could occur where project facilities or construction activities occupy the same field of view as other built facilities or affected landscapes and further degrade the view. A cumulative impact could also occur if a viewer's perception is that the general visual quality of an area is diminished by the presence of structures or construction effects (such as disturbed vegetation), even if the new structures are not within the same field of view as the existing structures. The significance of the cumulative impact would depend on the degree to which: (1) the viewshed is altered; (2) visual access to scenic resources is impaired; (3) visual quality is diminished; or (4) the project's visual contrast is increased.

#### **List of Past, Present and Reasonably Anticipated Future Wireless Projects in the Project Area**

The State CEQA Guidelines (Section 14355) indicate that a cumulative impact is "the change in the environment which results from the incremental impact of the project when added to other closely related past, present and reasonably foreseeable probable future projects." State CEQA Guidelines also require that cumulative impacts of a project be assessed.

This Subchapter provides information regarding past, present and reasonable anticipated future projects that could potentially combine with the proposed project to result in cumulatively considerable impacts.

One County operated wireless telecommunications project is located in the project vicinity and considered in the analysis of cumulative impacts. Table 1 below lists this project which is co-located with the proposed Project and shown on the Enlarged Site Plan, Figure 6.

Construction of the stealth Project facility in conjunction with other cumulatively considerable projects will avoid adverse visual impacts in a manner consistent with existing community character and surrounding development. This is accomplished through appropriate site selection,

stealth design, and supplemental landscaping, which enables the facility to relate to the existing visual environment to the maximum extent possible.

The evaluation considered the project's potential for incremental affects that is cumulatively considerable and determined that there are no significant cumulative effects associated with this project. Therefore, this project has been determined not to meet this mandatory finding of significance.

The Table below presents a list of past, present and reasonably anticipated wireless projects considered in the review of cumulative visual impacts, based on research of applicable environmental documents at the County of San Diego.

**TABLE 1 – LIST OF PAST, PRESENT and REASONABLY ANTICIPATED FUTURE WIRELESS PROJECTS IN LOCALIZED PROJECT AREA**

<i>Reference</i>	<i>Project No.</i>	<i>Project Name</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<b>1</b>	P06-049	Sprint/Nextel Site	LS

**Description**

Co-located facility

**LEGEND**

PS-POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT

LS-LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

SM-POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT UNLESS MITIGATION INCORPORATED

NA-NOT APPLICABLE

***5.7 Summary of Project Impacts and Significance and Conclusions***

Implementation of the proposed telecommunications project will preserve the existing rural visual environment and scenic resources within the project viewshed. While slight changes in the visual environment may occur to private and public views immediately surrounding the project, the majority of viewers will perceive the facility as being a part of the existing visual environment, both natural and man-made. Furthermore, the change in visual environment will lessen over time as surrounding vegetation matures and provides additional screening and visual context for the project.

As a stealth design, the project as proposed will appear consistent with the existing natural landscape and visual character of the surrounding community. The project will further provide screening for the existing water towers, reducing the visual contrast of these facilities relative to the surrounding natural vegetation. The project is therefore not anticipated to result in significant adverse visual character impacts and would be consistent with County policy related to wireless telecommunications facilities and visual effects.

In conclusion, the telecommunications tower and associated equipment enclosure will not cause a substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic effect to views from the surrounding area.

## **6.0 Visual Mitigation and Design Considerations**

The following design considerations are suggested to further ensure the Project blends with the existing visual environment to the maximum extent possible.

While project landscaping would help to reduce the visual impacts created by the Project by screening the equipment enclosure from view and, providing context for the monopine, native species should be used.

Careful consideration should be given to the design of the monopines so that they are constructed with natural branching patterns that relate in color, form, and texture with the proposed live Pines at maturity. The branches of the monopine shall begin no higher than six-feet above finished grade.

An automatic irrigation system is recommended to help ensure optimal growth conditions for the proposed landscaping.

## **7.0 References**

### *County of San Diego*

- 1979 Central Mountain Community Plan. April 17, 2002, as amended.
- 1986 San Diego County Code of Regulatory Ordinances. Light Pollution Code. Section 59.101 et seq. Chapter 9
- 1978 San Diego County Zoning Ordinance. March 2006, as amended.
- 1991 Resource Protection Ordinance of San Diego County. October 10.
- 1975, amended 1986 Scenic Highways Element. San Diego County General Plan.
- 2007 Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements – Visual Resources.
- US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (USFS) Visual Management System
- United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Visual Resource Management System.
- United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects

## **8.0 Report Preparer**

This report was prepared by:

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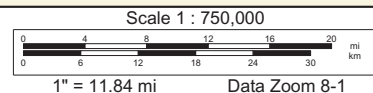
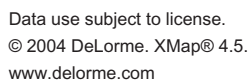
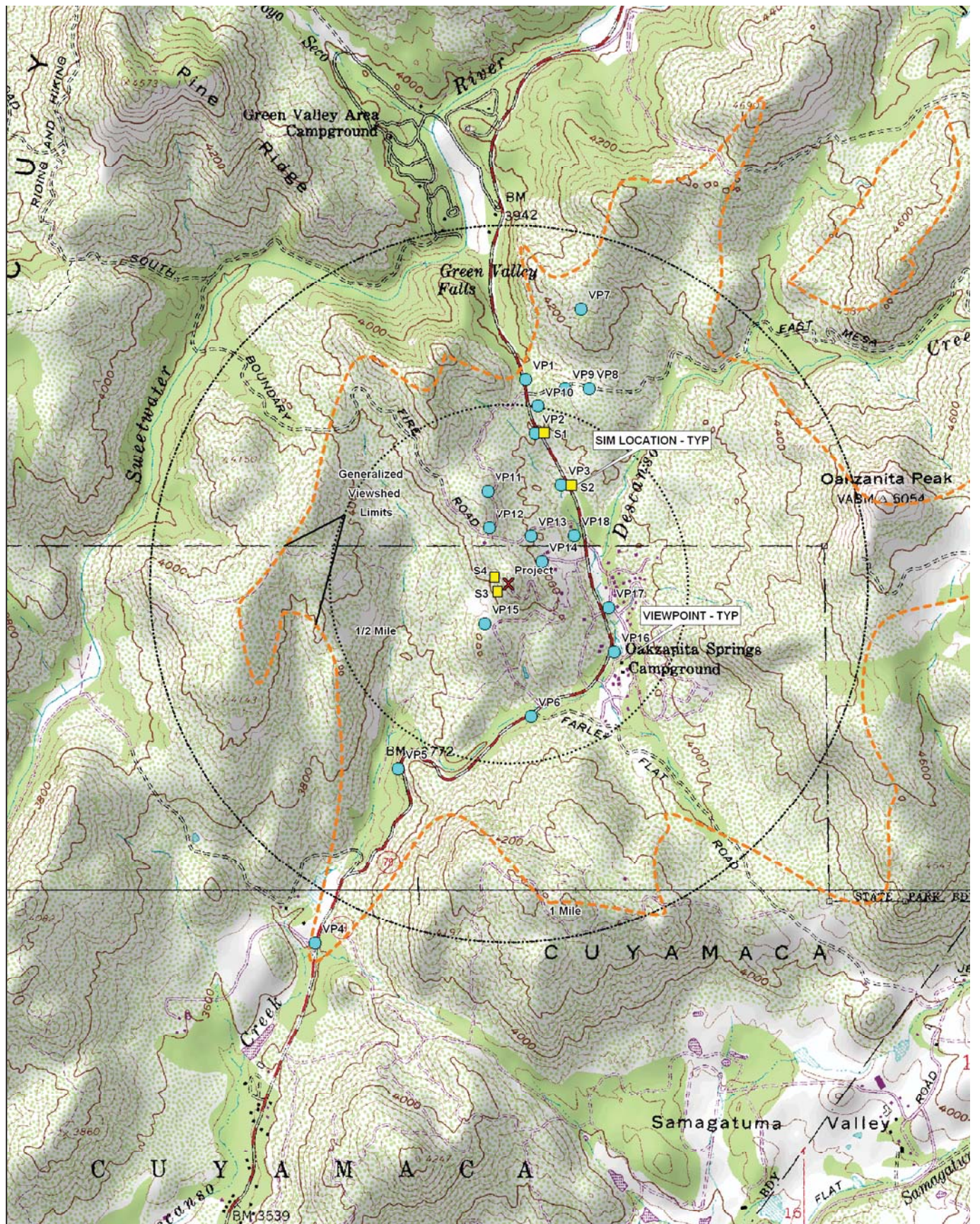


Figure 1 - Regional Location Map  
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 www.delorme.com

Figure 2 - Generalized Viewshed  
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 24

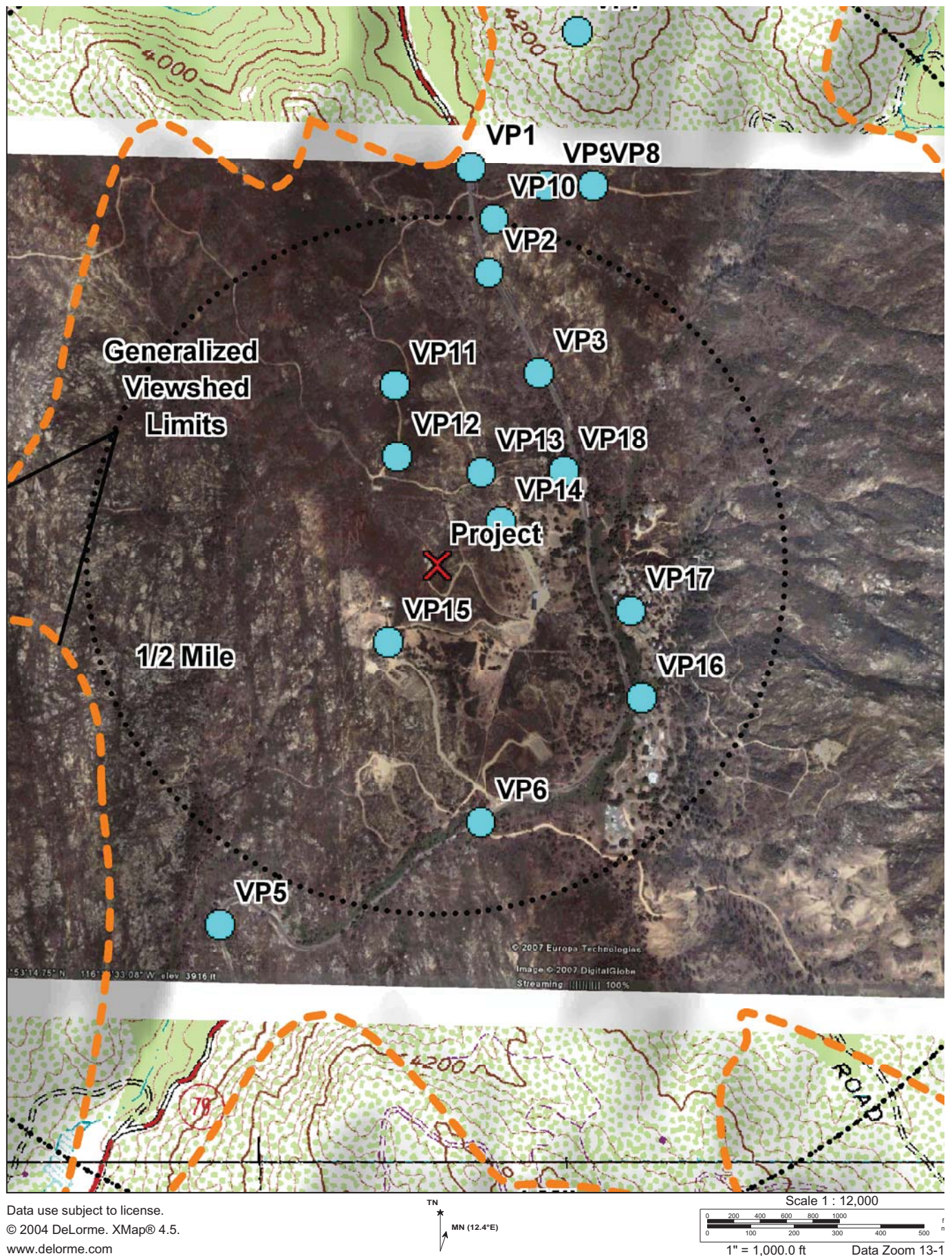
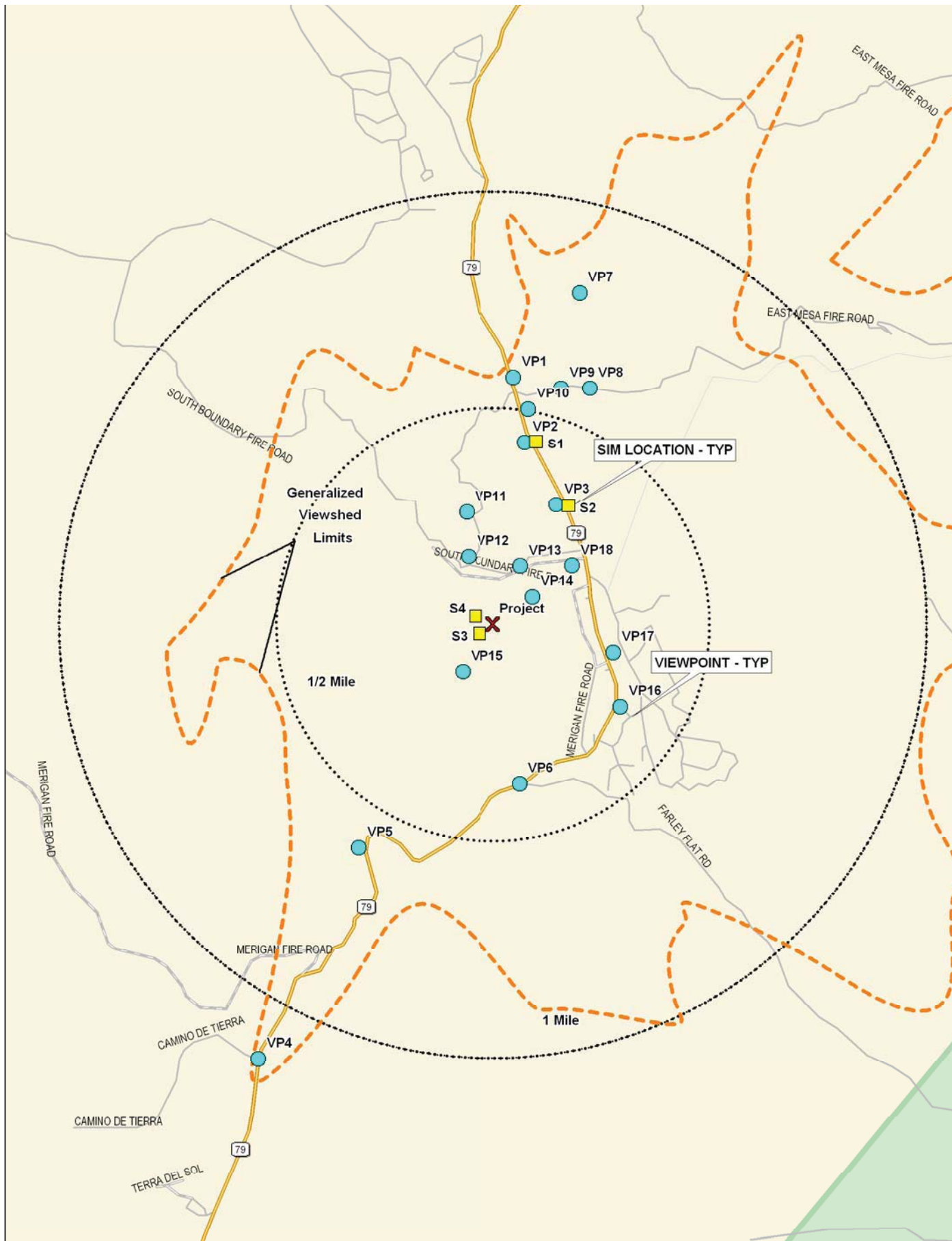


Figure 3 - Aerial Photo and Generalized Viewshed  
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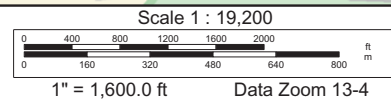
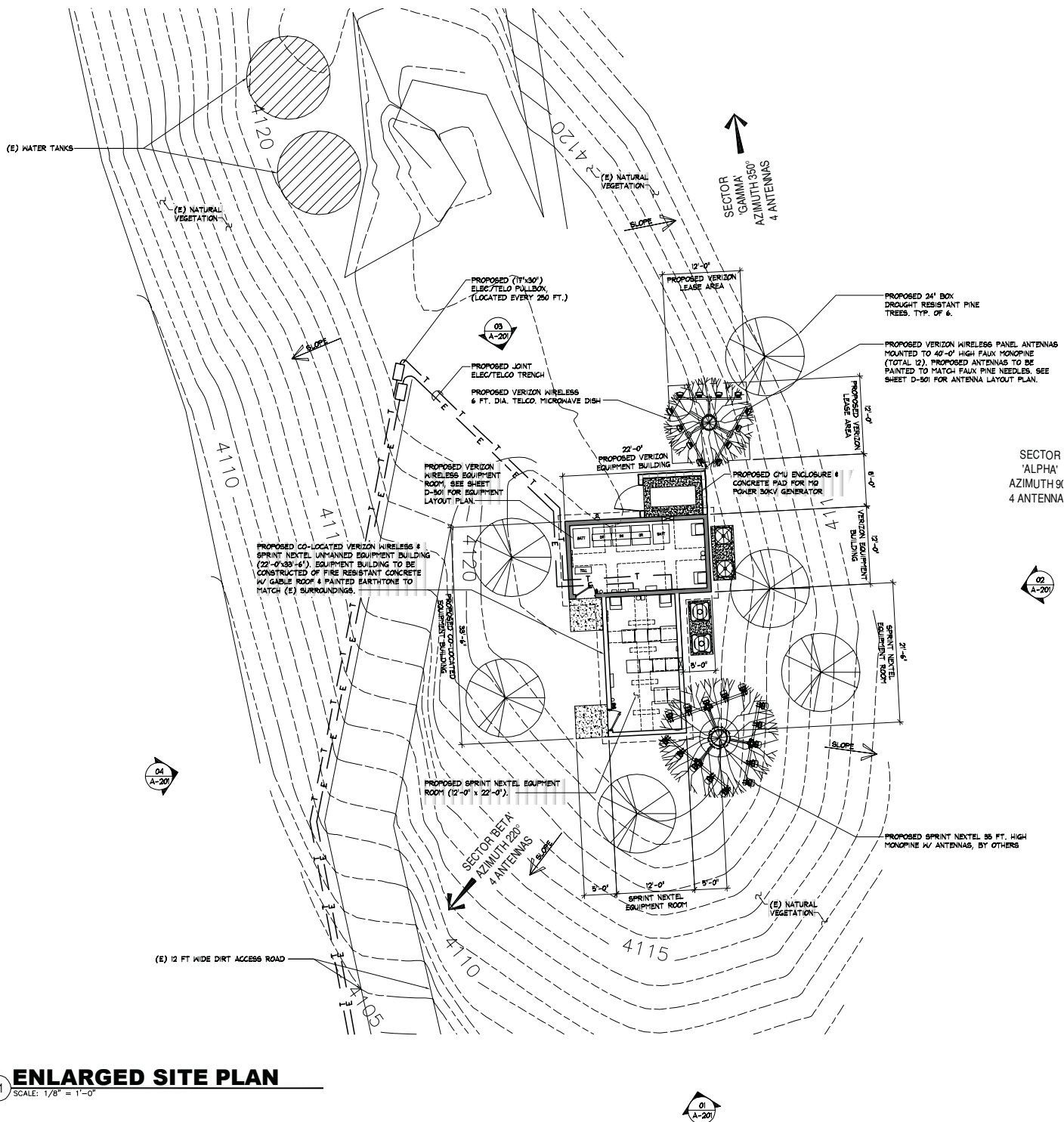
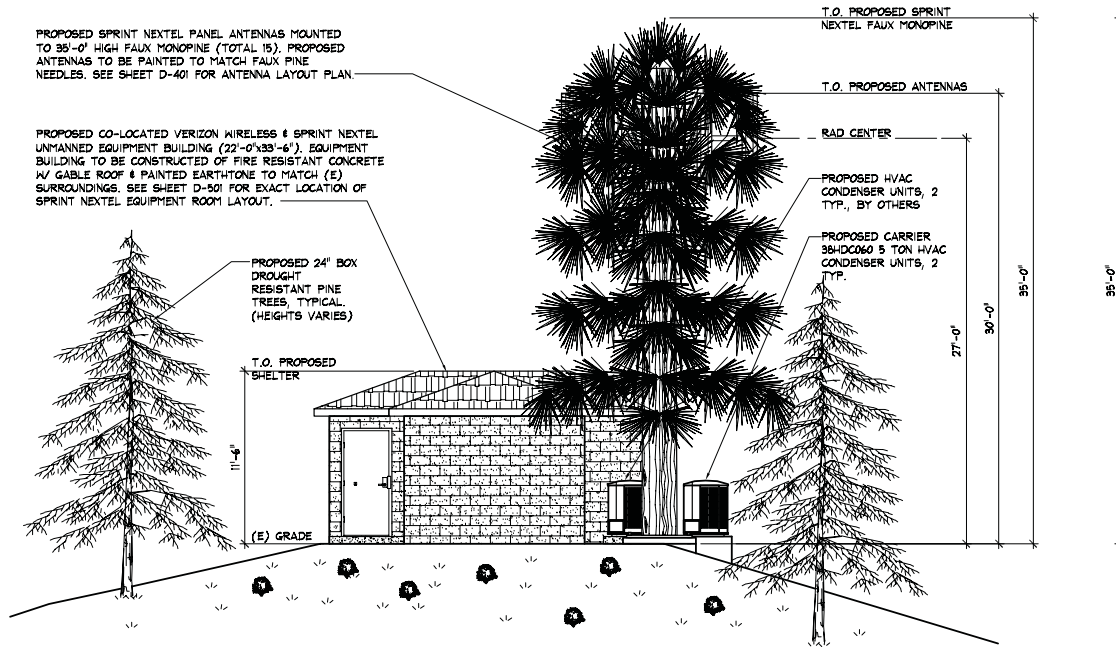


Figure 4 - Local Vicinity Map  
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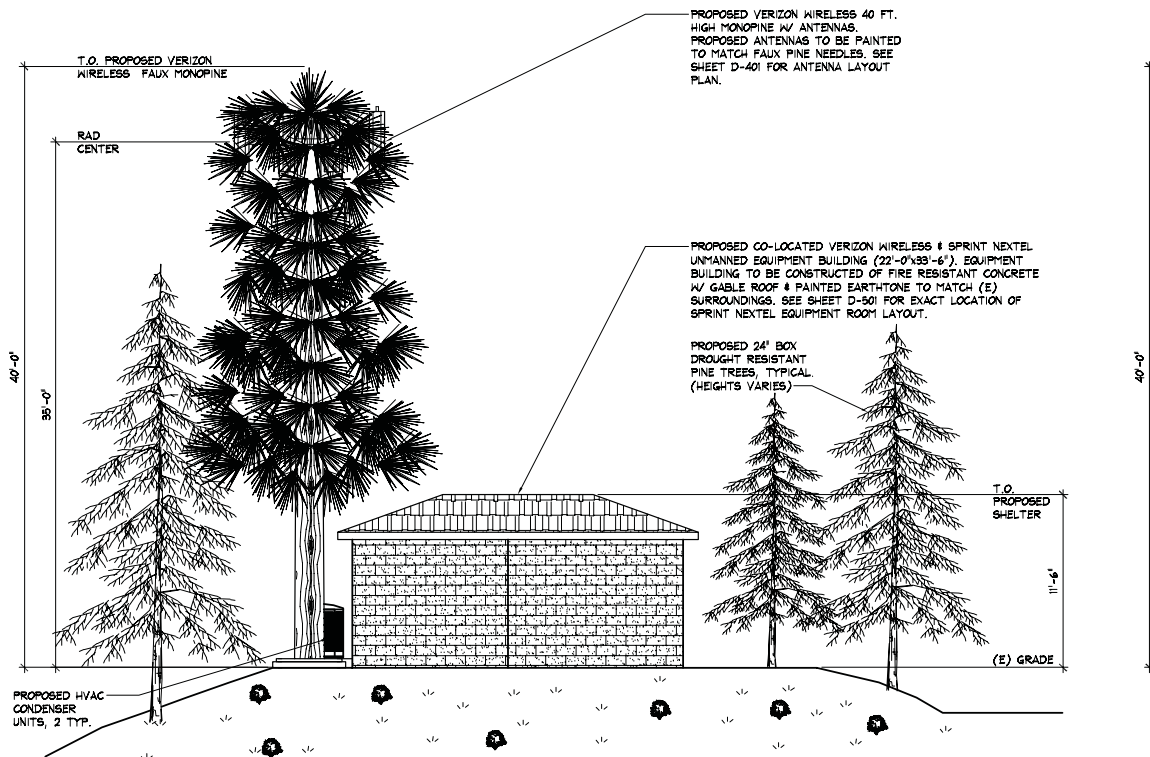






## 01 SOUTH ELEVATION

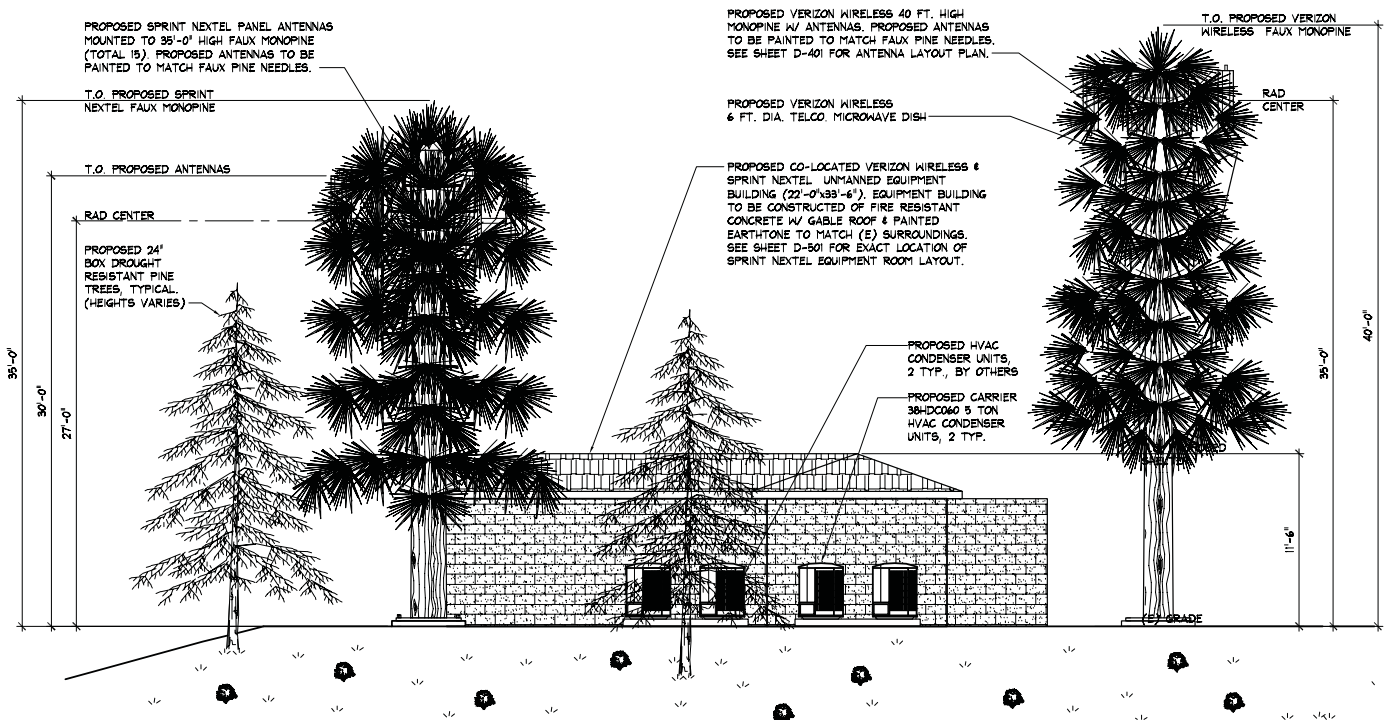
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## 04 NORTH ELEVATION

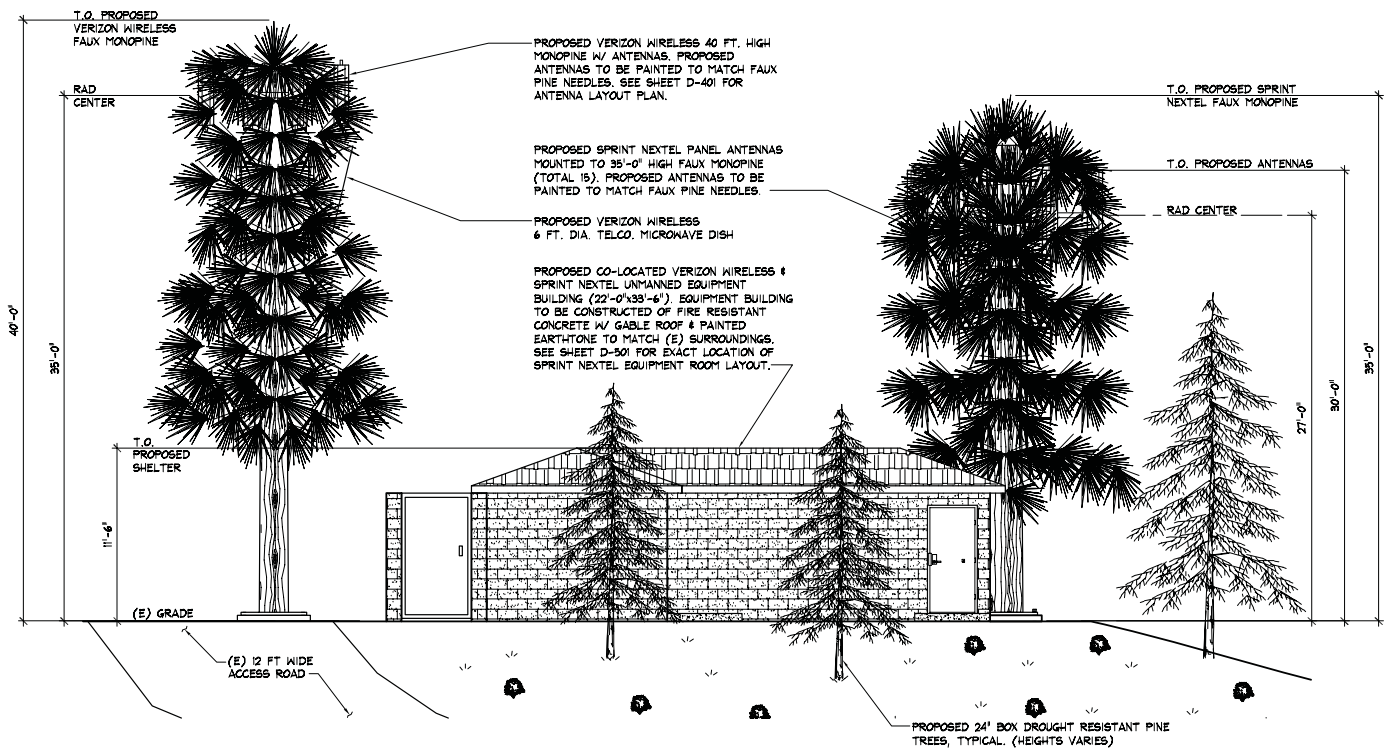
SCALE: 3/16" = 1'-0"

Figure 7 - Project Elevations  
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## 02 EAST ELEVATION

SCALE: 3/16" = 1'-0"



## 03 WEST ELEVATION

SCALE: 3/16" = 1'-0"

Figure 8 - Project Elevations

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View looking southwest from project site. Note primary residence of Baker Ranch, middle left and Hwy 79, middle right.



View looking south from project site



View looking west from project site.



View looking east from project site. Note on-site primary residence, bottom left.



View looking north from project site.



View looking northeast from project site toward Hwy 79 corridor.



View looking southeast from project site. Note Oakszanita Springs Campground, middle center.



View looking northwest toward project site.



VP1-View looking south from the East Mesa parking area of the Cuyamaca Ranch State Park, near the Hwy 79 viewshed northern limit, approximately .6 miles from Project.



VP2-View looking south from a location on Hwy 79, approximately .4 miles from Project.



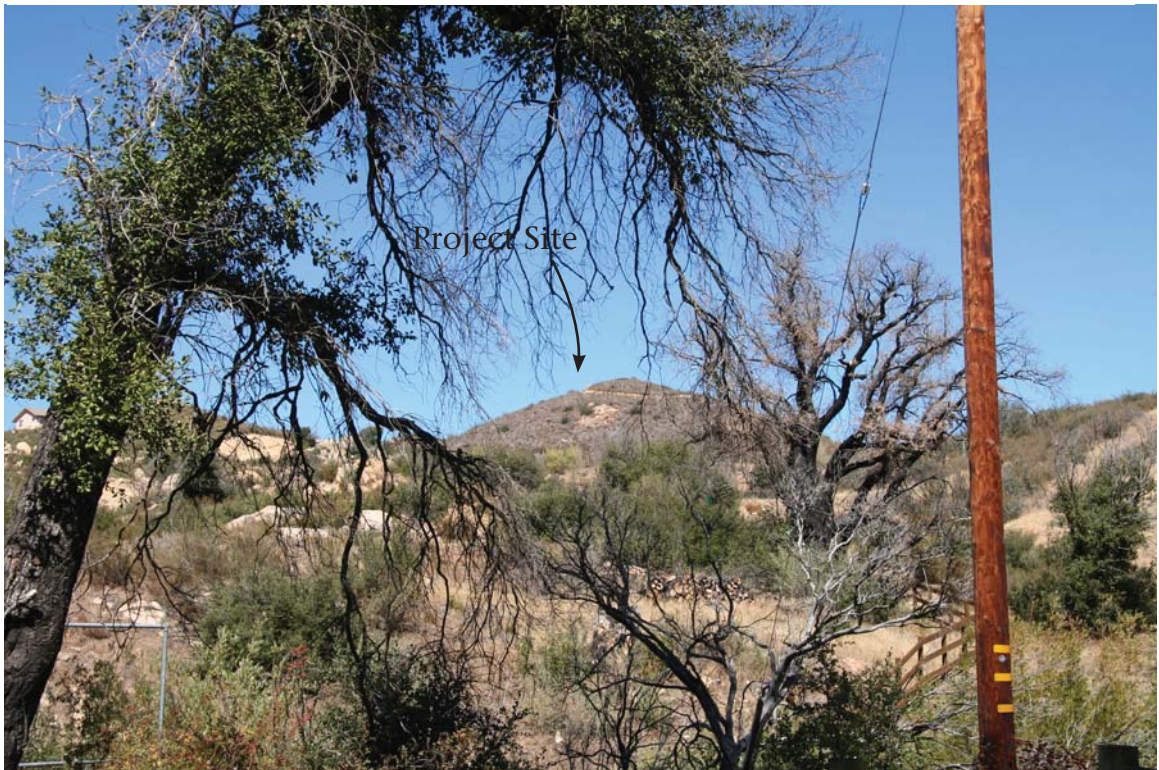
VP3 - View looking south west from a location along Hwy 79, approximately .3 miles from Project.



VP4 - View looking northeast near the Hwy 79/Camino de Tierra intersection and southern viewshed limits, approximately 1.1 miles from Project.



VP5 - View looking northeast from Hwy 79, approximately .6 miles from project.



VP6 - View looking north from a location near the Farley Flat/Hwy 79 intersection, approximately .4 miles from Project.



VP7 - View from the Cuyamaca Rancho State Park from a location approximately .8 miles northeast of Project.



VP8 - View from the East Mesa Fire Trail of the Cuyamaca Rancho State Park from a location approximately .6 miles northeast of Project



VP9 - View from the East Mesa Fire Trail from a location approximately .6 miles northeast of Project.



VP10 - View from the East Side Trail of Cuyamaca Rancho State Park from a location approximately .5 miles northeast of Project.

Figure 17 - VP9 & VP10

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VP11 - View from the South Boundary Fire Trail of the Cuyamaca Ranch State Park from a location approximately .3 miles north of Project.

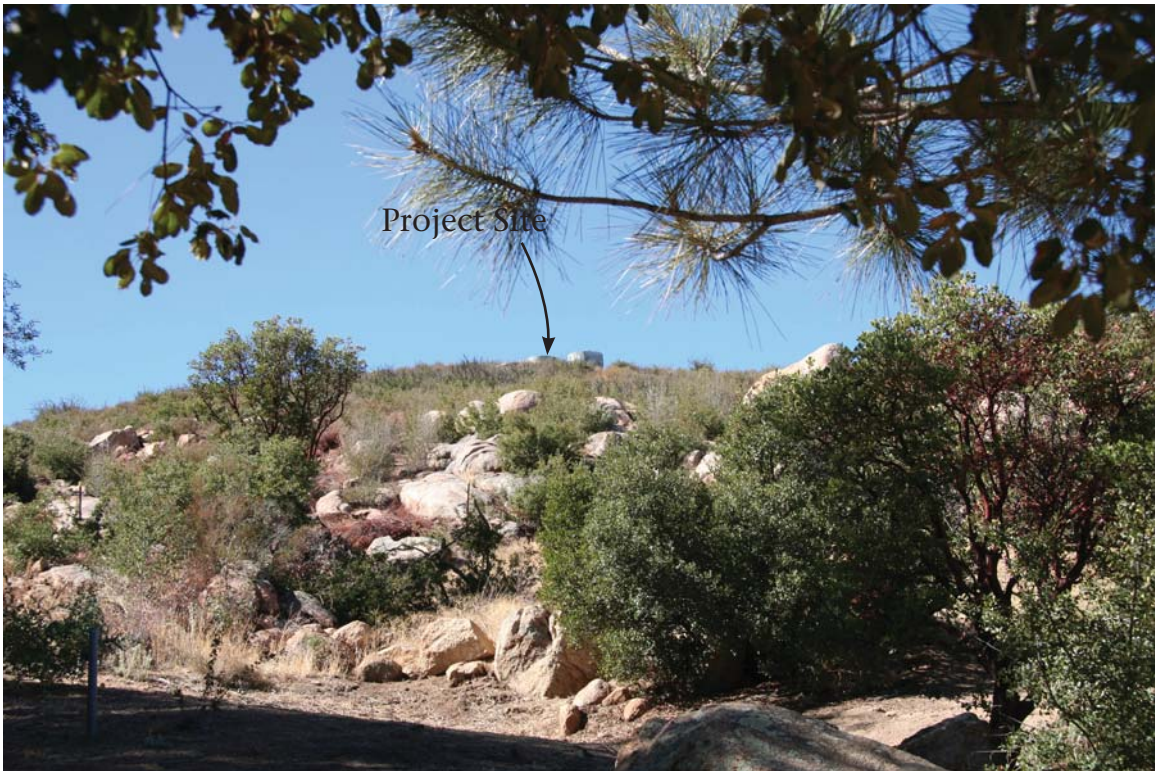


VP12 - View from the South Boundary Fire Trail of the Cuyamaca Rancho State Park from a location approximately 877 feet north of the Project.

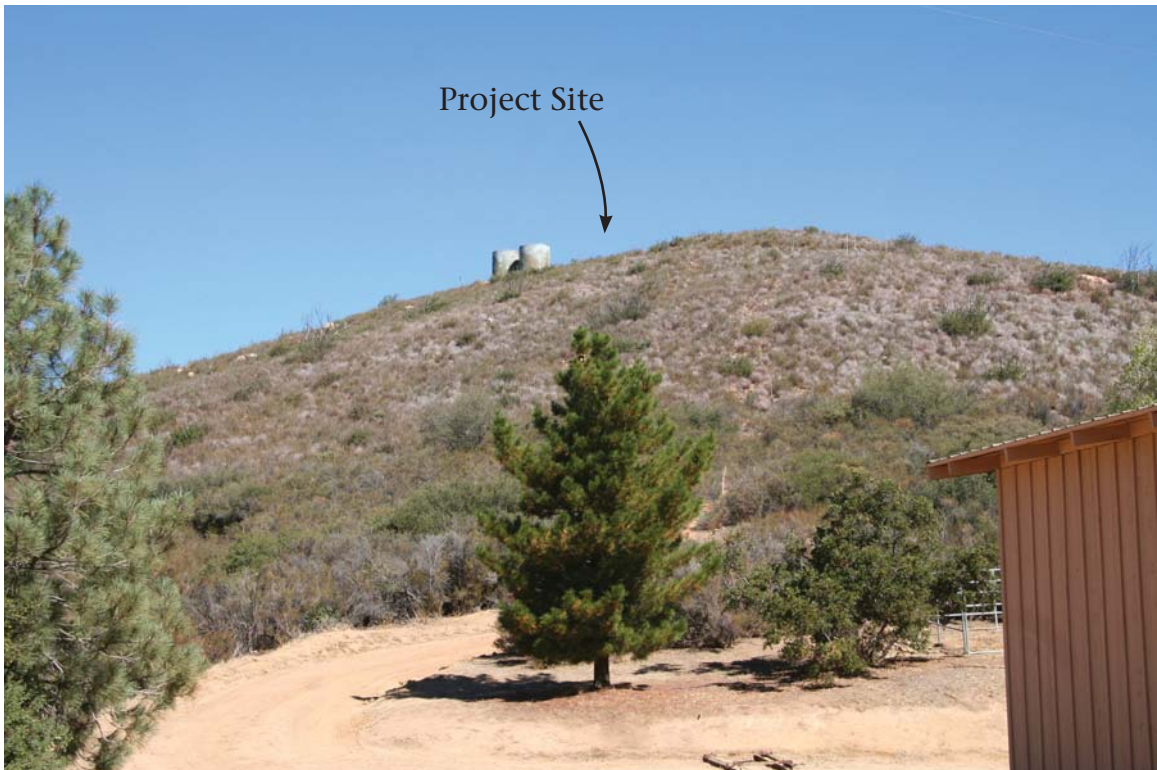


VP13 - View from a location near the southern terminus of the South Boundary Fire Trail, approximately 785' northeast of the Project.

Figure 19 - VP13



VP14 - On site view, near primary residence, 600-feet northeast of Project location.



VP15 - View from adjoining property approximately 685 feet to the south looking north toward Project location.



VP16 - View from the Hwy 79/Oakzanita Campground entry drive intersection, approximately 1,854 feet southeast from Project site.



VP17 - Private view from the Oakszanita Campground located approximately 1,500 feet southeast of Project location.



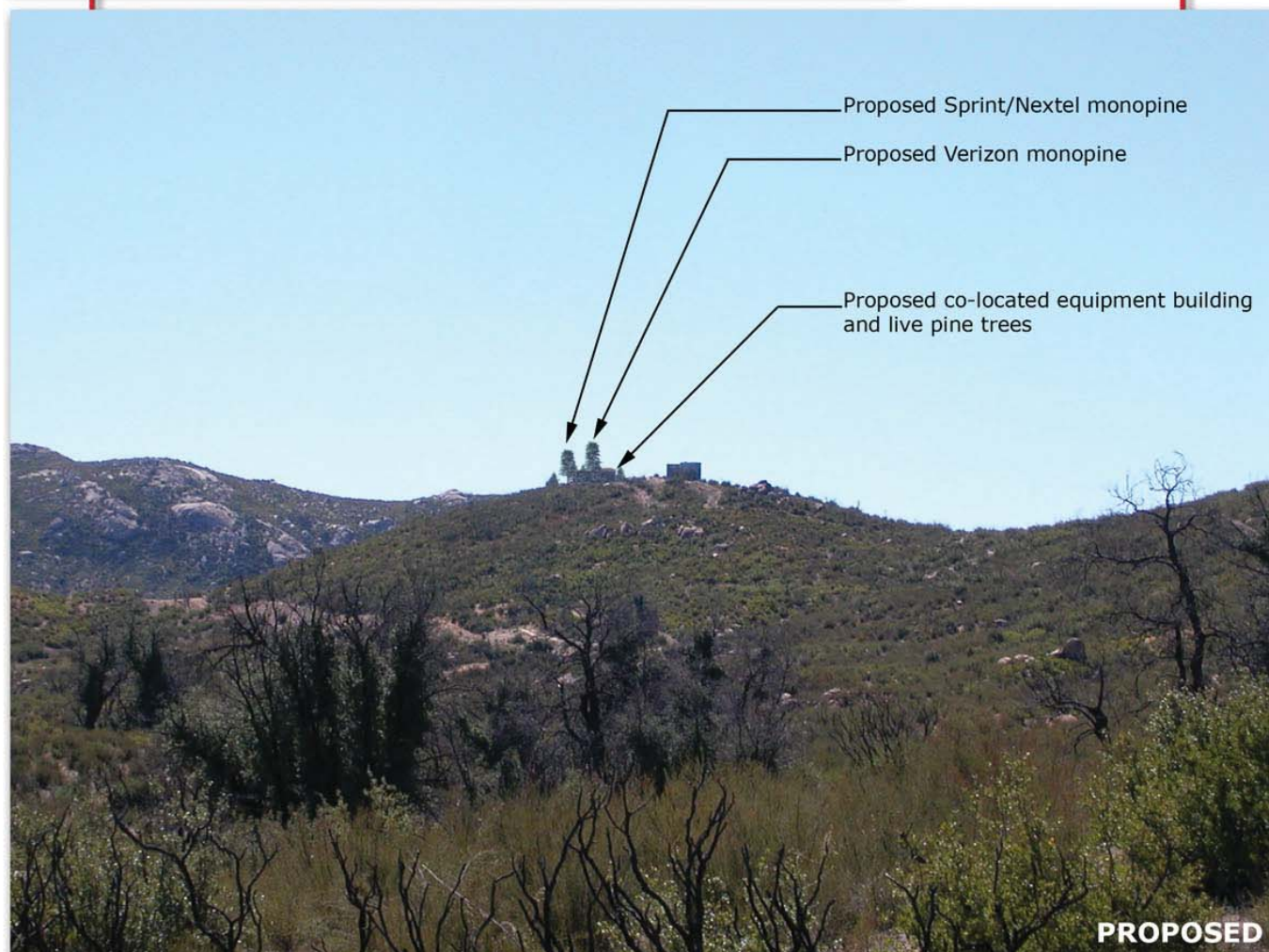
VP18 - Private view from residence located approximately 1,200-feet east of site.

Figure 22 - VP18

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**EXISTING**

**Descanso**  
11190 Highway 79  
Descanso, CA 91916



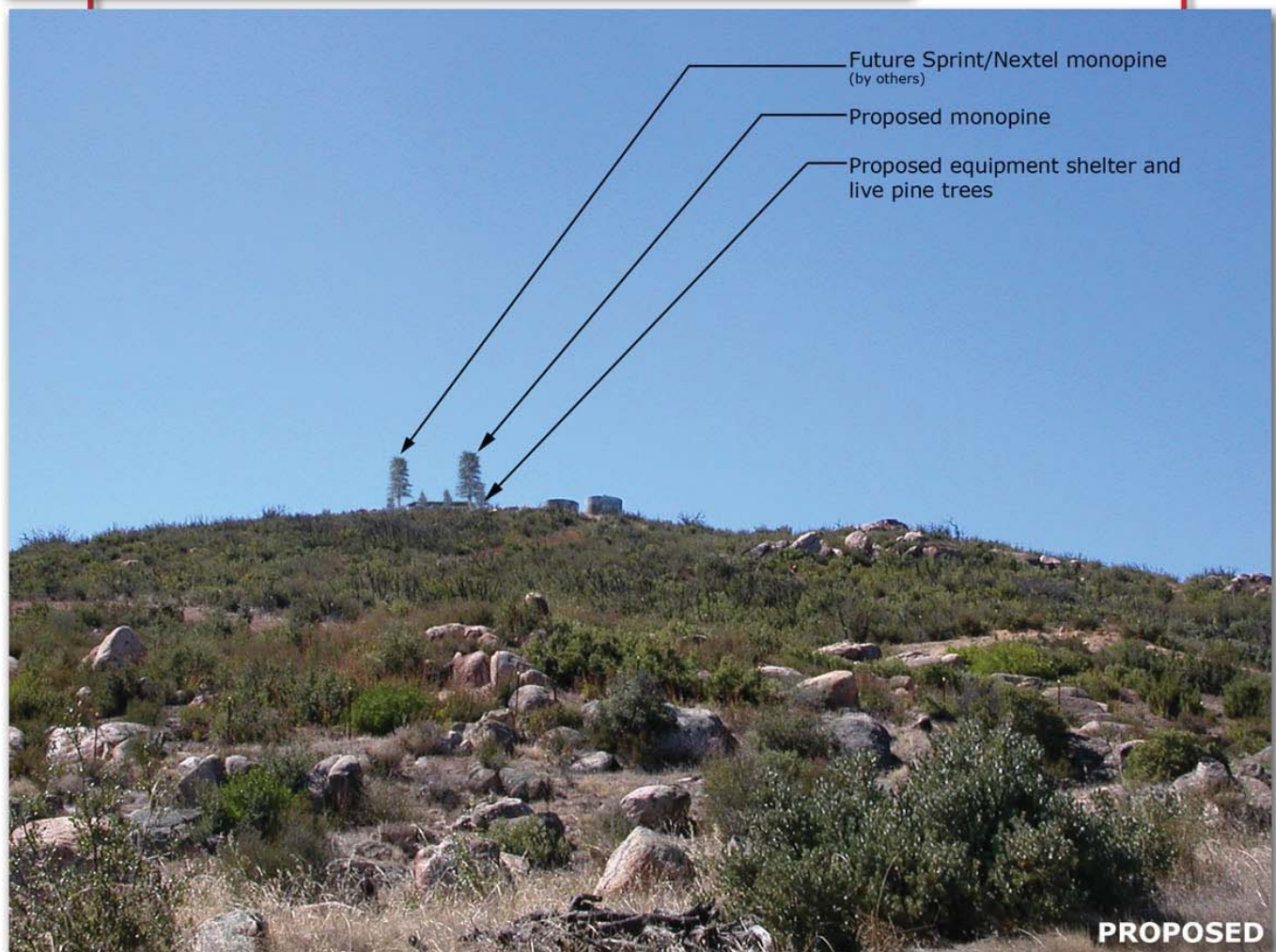
***Photosimulation of proposed telecommunications site***

Source: Plancom Inc.

Figure 23 - Simulation 1  
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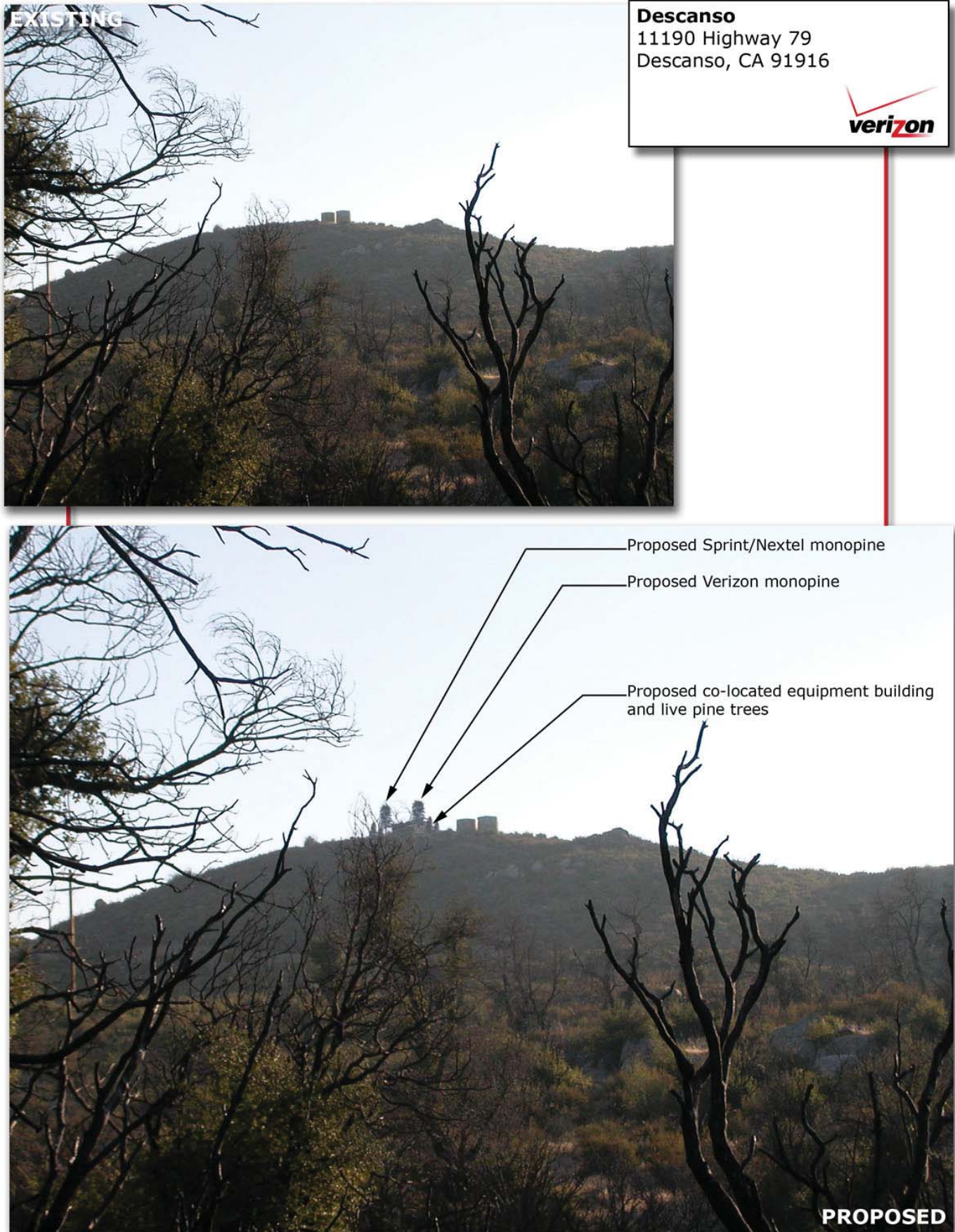
**EXISTING**

**Descanso**  
11190 Highway 79  
Descanso, CA 91916



***Photosimulation of proposed telecommunications site: Looking SW from residence***

Source: Plancom Inc.

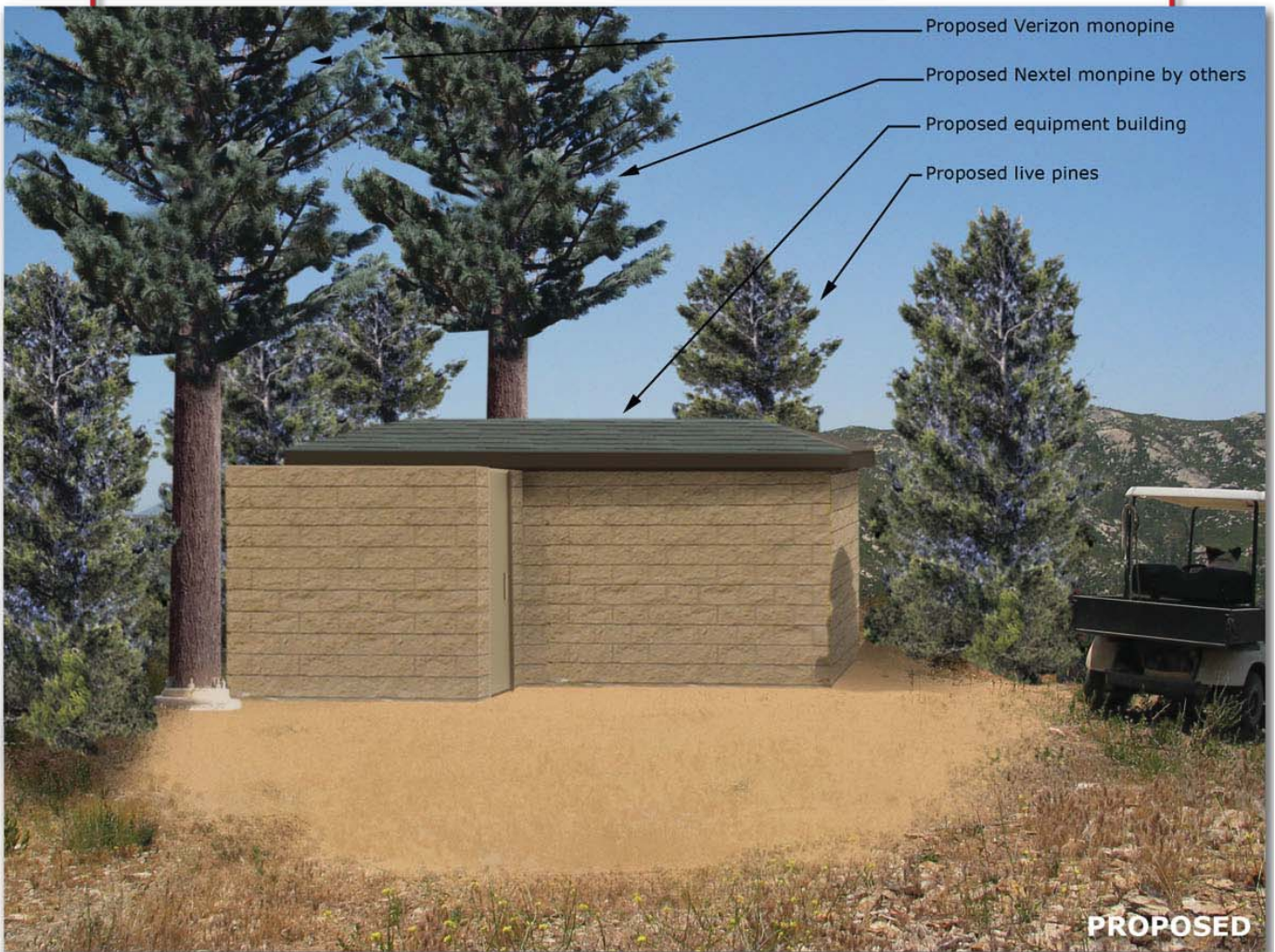


**Photosimulation of proposed telecommunications site**

Source: Plancom Inc.

**EXISTING**

**Descanso**  
11190 Highway 79  
Descanso, CA 91916



**PROPOSED**

**Photosimulation of proposed telecommunications site**

Source: Plancom Inc.

Figure 26 - Simulation 4  
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